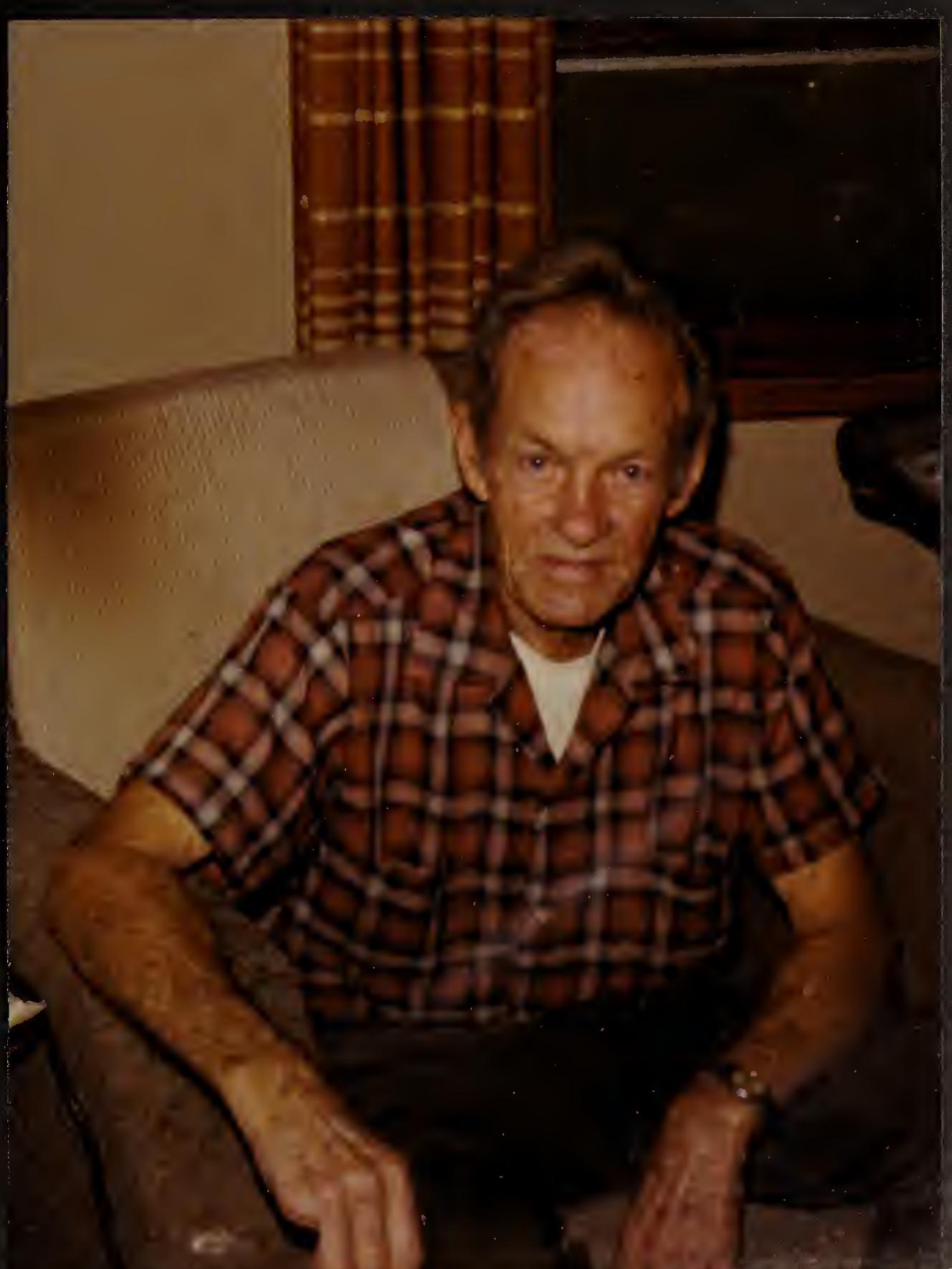


Joliet Junior College
Oral History Program
James Little

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

Lynne Styhr
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(signature)

September 29, 1975
(date)

Interviewee

James J. Little
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385 W 18th St
(address)

Coal City IL
(city & state)

Sept. 29-1975
(date)

A faint, sepia-toned background image of a classical building with four columns and a triangular pediment, centered behind the text.

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INTERVIEWEE: Mr. James Little

INTERVIEWER: Miss Lynne Stybr

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with James Little for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Lynne Stybr at Mr. Little's home in Coal City, Illinois, on September 29, 1975, at 3:45 p.m.

LITTLE: I was born in the Diamond August 6th, 1898, and lived in the Diamond for two years before moving to Lorenzo, Illinois, where we lived for three years. My dad went farming. He farmed with his uncle. His uncle liked to drink beer quite a bit so they couldn't get along, so he quit farming. We moved back to Diamond and my dad went to work in the mines.

STYBR: Tell me about your parents' background.

LITTLE: My mother was born in Canada and my dad was born in England.

STYBR: Did he come over here, then? How did he meet your mother?

LITTLE: Oh, I don't know.

STYBR: In Chicago, maybe?

LITTLE: I don't think so. He must have met her right here in Diamond. I don't know that.

STYBR: Where did you go to school?

LITTLE: I went to Diamond School and went through the eighth grade. I worked on a farm for fifty cents a day and I worked there every vacation. Then, when I quit school, I worked on the farm and put up hay, and baled

hay for seventy-five cents a day. When I first started on the farm, I worked for Chris Mulhall. I drove horses, plowing and disking; and I worked there for a while for fifteen dollars a month.

STYBR: And everything was pulled by horses?

LITTLE: Everything was pulled by horses. And I had to get up at four o'clock in the morning, go out and feed the horses, curry the horses, feed the hogs, come in for breakfast at six o'clock, and then we'd go back out to work and work till dinner time. Then we'd come in for dinner, feed the horses, then we'd work till about six o'clock. Then we'd come in and wash up and have supper. Then we'd go out and feed the hogs and clean the horses, until about eight o'clock -- and that was a day.

STYBR: I'll bet you were tired, then.

LITTLE: Oh, I didn't feel it then. /Laughter/ I worked for Frank Busytus putting up hay. I run the hayrake and loader, and I worked for Frank Busytus on the baling machine. We baled hay, and the bales weighed about 125 pounds, about as much as I weighed. /Laughter/ And we hauled them to the boxcar down here on the Santa Fe siding, and we loaded them up in the boxcar.

STYBR: Do you remember who had a tractor?

LITTLE: At least some of them had tractors, but ... they were real expensive. Old, old-timers, you know, a way back and when I first started baling hay, we used a team of horses to go around the circle pulling the baler, you know, and to bale the hay. Then we got a baler with a gasoline motor on it. Then, boy, that really baled hay!

STYBR: What did you do after the farm?

LITTLE: When I was about sixteen years old, about 1914, I worked down in the clothing factory. I run a sewing machine; that's why I can sew now.

STYBR: That's right -- 'cause you're pretty good at it.

LITTLE: I run the sewing machine for two years and a half, for nine dollars a week.

STYBR: Could you sew a regular suit or pants?

LITTLE: No, no, I just sewed the seam. Just the outside seam, you know, and the inside seam. That's all. That's all I done. That's all you had to do, you know, just one job. That's how it was done. Then I quit that and went on the railroad and worked there for three or four years, I'd say. I worked up in Chicago, too, at 18th Street switching; and we had to stay in the -- we had to stay in bunk cars up there. We bunked up there. And we had a cook, that cooked for us. We used to go up to State Street, you know in them days, and sometime we'd ride the streetcar and sometime we'd walk, and me and Johnny Bono, one time, we were walking and there was a dray man coming along with a wagon, you know, and we jumped on the back end of the wagon and got a ride, and here we was riding down along there, and pretty soon we looked down on the sidewalk over there and there was Shorty Smith walking down the sidewalk.

STYBR: Somebody you knew? From Diamond?

LITTLE: Yes. And we hollered at him, and boy, his eyes popped out, and he couldn't figure out who the dickens that was on the wagon. Laughter

STYBR: Did the driver ever know you were on his wagon?

LITTLE: Yeah, yeah. He didn't bother because we were just sitting with our legs hanging down the back, you know. Laughter

STYBR: You got to see Chicago, then, didn't you?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. I worked up there for a year. That was enough, too! And then I went on the pipe line, and I worked nine hours a day on the pipe line for fifty-five cents an hour. Then from the pipe line I went to work for the State, putting up signs, painting signs, for fifty-five cents an hour. And then I left that job and I worked for the State upon the hard road. And then I worked there so long, and then I got a job down at Goose Lake at the clay pit for forty cents an hour working nine hours a day. I switched down there and run a dinky.

STYBR: What's a dinky?

LITTLE: A little locomotive, a little switchie. It pulled the cars with clay in them.

STYBR: Other people would load the clay in and you would pull it?

LITTLE: Yes, we'd take the cars into the shovel and the engineer at the shovel, he'd load the cars and we'd pull them back out again and we'd take them down to a switch down below and hook them up to a cable and a fellow up in the building would pull them up into the building, you know, with a cable and dump it into the crusher. And they'd crush it there, and they had different screens for different grades of clay. And it would go in the bins and they'd load the boxcars out of the bins.

STYBR: Now what was all this clay used for?

LITTLE: This clay was used for ... Steel mills used most of the clay for bonding these here furnaces, you know, where they melt the steel and that, and some of the clay -- what they called the green clay -- was used in drilling. Where the fellow was drilling, he'd put the clay in the hole and it sealed up the crevices and that, and it kept the water out of the hole, you know -- for oil drilling. And I worked out there with the drill, too, drilling holes in the clay and loading it with dynamite and shooting the clay, you know, busting it up.

STYBR: Weren't you scared? I'd be afraid of dynamite.

LITTLE: I wasn't afraid of nothing in them days. /Laughter/ It's all right to be afraid, if you're afraid of it. There's no use in monkeying around with it.

STYBR: Did you work at the clay pit the longest?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. I worked in the clay pit from 1925 to 1964.

STYBR: You must've liked that the best.

LITTLE: Yeah, I liked the job; I liked the job pretty good. It wasn't too big a pay, but it was steady.

STYBR: Is that why you quit those other jobs, or couldn't keep them, because it wasn't steady work?

LITTLE: Some of those other jobs run out, you know. Jobs get finished and you go. I was on all kinds of different jobs.

STYBR: You just have to go some place else after they finish.

LITTLE: Yeah. If you didn't go on the railroad or the pipe line -- the only other place around here at that time, that is early, you know, was down in the mines. And my dad wouldn't take us down in the mines. He wouldn't take any of us down in the mines. He said one in the family is enough down in the mines.

STYBR: Did he tell you a lot about the mines, working there?

LITTLE: No, not too much. It was awful wet, like rat holes. He'd come home, he'd be all wet and they didn't have no change rooms or anything then. He'd come home all wet in the wintertime. He'd come home and he drove a horse and buggy out about seven miles to the mine, from home to Diamond, and in the wintertime he'd come home and he'd have to thaw his clothes out before he could get them off. They'd stand up by themselves.

STYBR: Oh, just froze, huh?

LITTLE: Yeah. Froze solid.

STYBR: Didn't he get sick very much?

LITTLE: No, no. He was never hardly sick in his life. Laughter

STYBR: That's good! Did he ever have any really bad accidents?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. One time he had a great big rock fall on him. I guess it weighed about a half a ton. It caught his leg and broke his leg. And he was out of work for about six months. Boy, it was hard times then. We raised chickens and a couple of pigs, you know. We had a big garden. That's about all we lived on when he was off work. No compensation or nothing then when you was off work.

STYBR: Do you remember anything about the Diamond mine disaster on February 16, 1883?

LITTLE: No; I wasn't born yet, and my dad was still farming, but there was sixty-nine men and boys got killed that day, because of water seeping down into the mine so quickly, that by the time anyone knew of the leaking it was going so fast that some couldn't get out from down those shafts in time. The mine was actually in Braidwood, but there's a memorial marker on the site where the lost miners are thought to have been.

STYBR: Tell me about your brothers and sisters.

LITTLE: I had one brother and two sisters. And my brother passed away and one of my sisters passed away, too.

STYBR: Did they work, too?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah, my brother, he worked on the Pennsylvania Railroad as a cable splicer. He had a good job.

STYBR: Is he older then you?

LITTLE: No. Younger. He was foreman. Later on in years, before he passed away ... Well, he was retired when he passed away. He liked to travel. He didn't like to stay around in one place all of the time. But he stayed a long time on that job, because he liked it. He used to climb the poles, you know. And all that.

STYBR: That's good that he liked it. How about your sisters? What did they do?

LITTLE: Well, one of my sisters, she didn't do very much. The one that

passed away -- Glen Allen's mother. When she was away on school vacation, she'd be down in Gilespie, Illinois, or some place. She never did hardly bring any money into the house. I shouldn't be talking about her like that.

STYBR: She just wanted to have a good time instead of work?

LITTLE: Yeah, and my other sister, Aunt Jessie, she taught school in -- Eureka School -- for \$65 a month. She done her own janitor work, and she had to walk about three miles to school in all kinds of weather. And she taught about, I don't know how many kids they had in that school. Around fifty or sixty kids. And she taught them all, from first grade till eighth grade, you know. It ain't like now. You don't have so many kids; you just teach one grade.

STYBR: Did she go through the eighth grade herself, or did she need more education to teach?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah, she went to high school. She went to high school, and then every summer she'd go to summer school down in Normal. I'd take her down there. That's after she was teaching. She had to go down there every summer for I don't know how long, a couple of weeks or a month -- something like that. That was tough then, boy.

STYBR: I'll bet! I'll bet it was hard being a teacher.

LITTLE: Sure! You had all them different grades, you know, to teach. That ain't so easy! But all the kids, they seemed to be pretty smart, passing grades you know, and that, passed and went to high school.

STYBR: Do you remember when your father bought his first car?

LITTLE: In 1919 we bought our first car.

STYBR: What kind was it?

LITTLE: A Model "T".

STYBR: Oh, I bet that was exciting!

LITTLE: Oh, boy! You had to crank it -- no self-starter on it. You had to crank it. You'd go out in the wintertime and no heater. Just the side curtains, you know, and the isinglass would break in the side curtains, you know, and would have air holes all over. But we didn't seem to mind it much then.

STYBR: How much did that car cost?

LITTLE: Five hundred and some dollars. /Laughter/

STYBR: I bet that seemed like a lot then, though.

LITTLE: Oh, geez, and how! /Laughter/ Sure five hundred and some dollars are hard to come by.

STYBR: Did you have it for a long time?

LITTLE: No, not too long. We had it in 1919, and we got another one in 1924. It had a self-starter on it, though, boy. That was a nice one. Then we had that one until 1927, and then we got a 1927 Ford sedan, two-door sedan.

STYBR: Wow!

LITTLE: /Laughter/ Gettin' up in the world.... Then it was a lemon,

though. I had a lot of trouble with it, and I traded it in for an Essex, a '27 Essex. I had that Essex for two years, and I traded it in for a '29 Essex. Then I had it till 1935, and I traded it in for a Ford, Ford V-8 sedan. Then I kept buying Fords ever since.

STYBR: You've got a Ford now.

LITTLE: Yeah.

STYBR: You are such a good fisherman. Did you fish all your life?

LITTLE: Yeah, oh, yeah.

STYBR: Then you just kept getting more tackle?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. I got a box full of tackle -- I don't use half of it. /Laughter/

STYBR: Was there a good place to go fishing in Diamond?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. When we went fishin' when I was a kid, all we used was a piece of willow (limb), store string, and a bent pin for a hook. /Laughter/

STYBR: Did you catch them, too?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah, sure. Little ones, not great big ones. Boy! We fished the canal, and we fished different mine ponds down there. Then later on I got some real tackle, you know, and we fished the river all the time, the Kankakee River. Boy, we got some nice fish out of there until they built the dam down there and it raised it a way up, you know. And then they spoiled the fishin' down there. Sometimes we could walk

across that Kankakee River and not get your shoes wet, from one stone to another, you know.

STYBR: The water's real rough there now, isn't it?

LITTLE: Not now, it ain't.

STYBR: Not now?

LITTLE: It's too high. Too much water. It was rough before when it was low. Yeah, ripples. And it was nice fishin'. When we was kids, we used to climb up the piers on that old bridge, you know, and we played chicken, you know. We'd run up that there end of them piers, them slanted spans, you know. We'd go up there like monkeys, and then we would walk on top of that, way up on top of the bridge, about 75 feet down to the water, just playing chicken, bluffin' each other. /Chuckle/ It's a wonder some of us never got killed. /Laughter/

STYBR: Yeah, good thing.

LITTLE: Now you can't go up more'n 20 feet. No! Well, you could go up 20 feet, but not too high any more.

STYBR: No, I wouldn't go up 75 feet, or even 20 feet now.

LITTLE: About that wide when you got to the top of it. (Hand gesture)

STYBR: About a foot and a half?

LITTLE: Yeah.

STYBR: Gee! Bet it made you dizzy when you looked down?

LITTLE: No, it didn't bother me.

STYBR: Not when you were little, huh?

LITTLE: It never bothered me a bit.

STYBR: Oh, boy! You really lived dangerously back then, didn't you?

LITTLE: Yeah, yeah, and how! Oh, boy! We used to go swimmin' in the mine pits, you know, and we'd be divin' off an old mine car in the water. And I dived one time and I hit the bottom with my head and I seen stars underneath the water. /Laughter/

STYBR: Good thing you came back up, huh?

LITTLE: It wasn't too deep, though -- maybe about eight, ten feet deep.

STYBR: That's easy to do, dive straight down and hit.

LITTLE: And it was solid, too.

STYBR: And, Grandpa, you didn't even know how to swim! You can't even swim to this day!

LITTLE: Oh, but I didn't want to tell that!

STYBR: When did you get your first telephone?

LITTLE: Oh, I don't know what year we got the first telephone. It was -- oh, a long time ago. It was one of them ones, one of them box-type ones that hang on the wall, you know. You had to crank it and tell "Central" what number you wanted, and she'd get the number for you.

/Chuckle/

STYBR: Was that after you were born when you got the telephone?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. I was big then. We didn't get a telephone till late down in the Diamond down there, and electric lights either. We used kerosene lamps, and then we got the Coleman gas lamp with a mantle, you know. And boy, they were something. They were something compared to the kerosene lamps. But, then, later on we got electricity down there. Oh, when I was small, too, my mother used to wash on a machine you had to turn by hand, you know -- with a wheel on the end -- and had to turn it by hand, that washing machine. And every Sunday, we used to have a rain barrel around the house, you know, to catch the rainwater from the house. In the summertime that is what she used to wash the clothes. And then in the wintertime them barrels would freeze solid, you know, and we would chop all the ice out of the barrels on a Sunday afternoon -- that was our job on a Sunday afternoon in the wintertime. And fill a couple of tubs, and she'd take 'em in the house -- we had a summer kitchen -- and she'd take them in there with the stove, you know, and melt all the ice so that she could wash clothes the next morning. And when the barrels were empty with ice, there was a pond across the street from us, and we went over there and chopped ice and filled the tubs. Laughter Them was the good old days, you know!

STYBR: When you really worked hard -- wow!

LITTLE: They said, "Boy, the good old days, yeah." Laughter You didn't know no different than you know, but I wouldn't want to go back to them now.

STYBR: No, I bet it was really hard.

LITTLE: And how! And we had to carry water for the school, you know -- had to go about -- oh, I'd say from here to Art Trotter's house to the city pump with a bucket and carry water back to the school so they could drink.

STYBR: About two blocks, huh?

LITTLE: Yeah, yeah, and then took it back to the school and everybody drank out of it. They used the same dipper and everything, you know -- /Laughter/ and the same bucket!

STYBR: They didn't care!

LITTLE: Nobody died from it!

STYBR: That's a lot of good stuff, you know, if you think back and think of all the stuff you did, though. What did you do as a little kid, when you were teenagers? What did you do to have fun? You didn't go to movies or anything, did you?

LITTLE: Teenagers -- yeah, we went to movies. They had movies uptown here in Coal City. We only walked about two and a half miles to go to a movie, and uh, it was five cents.

STYBR: That's all right!

LITTLE: Five cents, and we got two cents to buy some candy. /Laughter/

STYBR: And were you brats? Did you throw candy and everything?

LITTLE: Huh?

STYBR: Did you throw candy at people like the kids do now? They always

throw jawbreakers and are real noisy. You probably didn't.

LITTLE: Throw jawbreakers! We were lucky to get them to eat, so we didn't throw them away!

STYBR: Oh, that is what I was going to say -- you didn't waste anything.

LITTLE: No, and how you never wasted anything! /Chuckle/ No.

STYBR: Did you get to go see movies very often?

LITTLE: Well, about once a week.

STYBR: Oh, that's pretty good.

LITTLE: Once a week.

STYBR: Save your nickles!

LITTLE: Yeah, they were about three movie houses in town then. All a nickle. /Chuckle/

STYBR: Is that all you had to do, though? Like if you wanted to go out and do something...

LITTLE: When we were small kids, if we wanted to go sledding, we had to make our own sled -- rode a bicycle without tires, till the rims wore off the wheels, and we made what they call a catnip. It was a piece of two-by-two, pointed on each end. It had numbers on each side, one through four, and you would hit it on one of the pointed ends with a paddle and then it would fly in the air, and they you'd hit it again. Whatever

number showed up would be the number of points you got. The first one to get so many points was the winner. I don't quite remember how the dickens that worked though. We made them -- we made pert near all our own games to play. We played horseshoes. Used to be a place down at the Diamond there where we'd all congregated at night and played horseshoes. Sat around and talked. There was never no show on the Diamond. The old mailman, he hauled the mail from Coal City down there. There was a Post Office down at the Diamond. The Post Office and store. And this old man, he hauled the mail with a horse and buggy from Coal City down to the Diamond, the Post Office in Diamond.

STYBR: What about the name Diamond, how'd it get the name?

LITTLE: The name Diamond? It got the name of Diamond by the coal, yeah, black diamond, that's what they call it, black diamond.

STYBR: Oh, and Coal City probably got its name the same way?

LITTLE: Same way -- from the coal, yeah.

STYBR: Well, how many people lived around Coal City then? The population of Coal City is now 3,000.

LITTLE: When the coal mines was all running, there was a lot more than that.

STYBR: Oh, really!

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. Diamond -- gee, Diamond alone -- all the houses all over down there -- you think there's a lot of houses down there now -- them new houses. But there was, I'd say, three times as many houses

down there then as there are now, but they weren't houses like is down there now. They were just coal miners' shacks. We had a pretty nice house. Well, you know where it's at -- Diamond. They're remodeling it now, back of the Steak House in the Diamond. That one right back there. Yeah, they're remodeling it now.

STYBR: It is nice.

LITTLE: Yeah, we had one in Braidwood, but some of them people, they lived in shacks, you know. Well, that's the way with coal miners. The mines would shut down, and a lot of them'd move over to Torino. To work in the mine over there.

STYBR: Where's Torino?

LITTLE: Oh, it was six miles south of here. There's nothin' there now -- strip mine's got it all dug up now, I think. My dad, he worked in a mine down on (Route) 113. You know that big dump way down on 113 -- he worked in that mine, too, and I think that's about the last mine he worked at. Then he went down to the clay pit and worked -- worked there until he retired.

STYBR: What was he at the clay pit, just a worker?

LITTLE: Yeah. Or anything there was to be done, he helped.

STYBR: Did you ever have any accidents at the clay pit?

LITTLE: Who? Me?

STYBR: Yeah, I had an accident. That's when I was switching. What they called the link-and-pin, you know, where you hooked the cars up. There

was a link and you dropped a pin down through it. And I used to hold the link up with a stick all the time, you know; and, I got too good at it, you know, and I started using my hand -- just my bare hand. I got along quite a while with it that way, but I got it one time, and that's how I lost that finger. /Chuckle/ Crippled this other one, and split my hand open here.

STYBR: I remember you used to tell us some of those things. You can never be too careful, can you? But you didn't know.

LITTLE: I got too smart, you know. I could do it without the stick. /Laughter/ You always get it when you get that way, you know. Careless.

STYBR: How about anybody else? Can you remember any really bad things that happened out there?

LITTLE: Oh, yeah. Eddie Chada's brother got killed out there, Johnny.

STYBR: What happened?

LITTLE: Well, he was carrying coal to the steam shovel. He was walking underneath the crane, the boom, and as he was walking in, the dipper stick, it goes out and then down, you know and gets the clay. It shot out and the safety bolts busted on top and it went right straight through. And he was just walking underneath, and he got it right in the head. Killed him right now.

STYBR: Oh, gosh!

LITTLE: Then I got his job after -- I got that job after. But I stayed away from underneath that crane.

STYBR: Oh, I would, too. Gosh! Well, when did you build this house, Grandpa?

LITTLE: Well, we built it in 1950.

STYBR: Did you build this all by yourself?

LITTLE: Oh, no, I didn't build nothin'. We painted, that's all.

STYBR: I thought you built it, because you could build about anything.

LITTLE: Oh, I wouldn't tackle a thing like that, though. It's too much, too much of a job. For one small job -- yeah -- but not a job like that.

STYBR: Was Grandma from Diamond?

LITTLE: No, she lived right here in an old house. That old house used to be right here, that we lived in first. Yeah, we lived in that house there, for, oh, quite a while. Then we built this one, and we sold the old house. It's down the street down here a little ways. Koerner bought it. He fixed it up pretty good, too. We got a thousand dollars for it.

STYBR: It would probably be worth ten times that much now.

LITTLE: It wasn't worth much more than that when he had to move it, you know. If you didn't have to move it, yeah, we could've gotten more money for it. But as it was, there wasn't enough room here for the two houses. It was still there when this one was built, but, shucks, it was right up against back there. They moved it out.

STYBR: And then you used to have chickens, didn't you, out right here?

LITTLE: Chickens, when I first got married.

STYBR: And what else?

LITTLE: We had a cat, and we had a dog, and I had pheasants -- I raised pheasants, quail, pigeons, rabbits, and -- chickens.

STYBR: Did you sell them all or did you eat them yourself?

LITTLE: Sold eggs, that's all. Not the pigeons, or that -- never sold them -- just raised them for the fun of it. Give them away, you know. Like I do with everything else. /Chuckle/

STYBR: Yeah, you sure do.

LITTLE: When we lived in the Diamond, we used to raise pigeons, too. And you used to be allowed at shooting matches, you know, to shoot and buy pigeons. They'd take them over there to the shooting match and turn them loose, and they'd shoot at them you know. So I used to sell them -- sell them to 'em, yeah. I betcha I had pigeons down there that I sold to them a dozen times. They'd always come home when they missed them, you know. They'd come right home, because I guess they thought they could stay here a little while.

STYBR: /Laughter/ And so you'd sell the same ones ten times?

LITTLE: So I'd sell the same ones over and over. /Laughter/ Some would come home crippled, you know, and we'd just get them and kill them, you know, and cook 'em. And they were good. Doc Johnson, he used to be in town here. He used to buy up all what you call squabs, you know, that's young pigeons, the little bitty ones. They ain't got hardly any

feathers. He used to buy all I could raise. Twenty-five cents a pair, for two. /Chuckle/

STYBR: What would he do, just raise them, then?

LITTLE: Eat 'em.

STYBR: Oh, eat the little ones?

LITTLE: Sure. Oh, he liked them. A lot of people ate them. You go buy squab -- I don't know about now -- if they still sell them -- but I know if you used to go buy them, boy, they were expensive in restaurants and that. Squabs.

STYBR: A real delicacy, huh?

LITTLE: Sure. Same as quail right now. You can get quail on toast, you know, boy, you pay for that, too! They're good, though, too, quail. Pheasant -- did you eat pheasant?

STYBR: Yeah, I did. For Christmas one time.

LITTLE: They're all right. Pheasant's all right, too.

STYBR: Now, on to something else -- Are there any little things you used to do? Did you ever get in any trouble for anything?

LITTLE: Naw, naw. As far as I got in trouble, if I mind, it was for smoking or something like that, you know. You'd get a beatin' for it. That's about the only trouble we ever got in.

STYBR: Did you roll your own cigarettes?

LITTLE: One time we was smokin' Dad's pipe. And we'd roll cigarettes out of corn silks and smoke that.

STYBR: Oh, I heard about doing that -- yeah.

LITTLE: But that was all right. Our mother never did find out about that. But once we smoked our Dad's pipe, me and my brother and another kid. The other kid wouldn't smoke, he wouldn't smoke, and he went and squealed on us, and boy, we got it. /Laughter/

STYBR: Oh! -- If it wasn't for him!

LITTLE: My mother was sick in bed then, and she called us into the bedroom, and she said, "Now, you go get the strap." She used to whip us with a strap all the time, the razor strap -- And we went out there and got the strap. And we'd go in there and take our shirt off and get down in front of her, you know, like that, and she'd hit us on the back. Yeah.

STYBR: You didn't have to get the strap, either, because she was in bed; you could've just ran away.

LITTLE: I know it! But my brother, too, got it! The same way. Sure /Laughter/ That's how much we obeyed her, you know. Boy, I think now how foolish we was! Boy, she'd leave welts on your back too. And I don't remember my Dad hittin' us once. But my mother took care of that /Chuckle/

STYBR: You said your Dad came from England. What did he do over in England?

LITTLE: I don't know, I don't know. I don't know if he come over here

as a young boy or when he come over.

STYBR: Maybe he just came over to work -- to see America like everybody else.

LITTLE: I think so, yeah. Same as my mother. They come down from Canada, down here. She was born in Canada, and they moved to the Diamond. And my uncle, he run the Diamond Store down there in Diamond. It was a company store; the mine owned it. And he run that for a while. And when they moved from the Diamond, and moved to Alabama, we moved over into the house that they left, you know. We lived right next to that house before they moved. It was a better house, so we moved into that house, but they went down to Alabama.

STYBR: What was down in Alabama?

LITTLE: There was mines down there, steel mills, mines; but my uncle, he run a store down there, too, a grocery store, and then later on he sold Fords -- a Ford salesman.

STYBR: It sounds like he did pretty good.

LITTLE: One of my cousins down there, he was a mine superintendent. And the other one, he was in the truckin' business. Truckin', you know. We drove down there one time, and your mama was just about five years old, I think. I don't think she was goin' to school yet. And we drove down there, down to Birmingham. But one of them lived just north of Birmingham, and the other one lived in a mining town they called Townley, Alabama. And you had to go through the mountains, you know. They ain't mountains; they was big hills, you know. But the roadway through the mountains is

just so wide -- enough for one car. They had places every so far, if you met a car, you could pull off to the side, you know. We got lost when we was down there, and we stopped at one old store down the hill to there, and there was a bunch of guys sittin' out in front there. We stopped to ask them how to get over to Bankhead Highway; that was the highway we was lookin' for, you know -- Bankhead Highway. And he says, "You all go down to Potter's Corner and turn left." I said, "Where's Potter's Corner? I don't know nothin' about Potter's Corner." /Laughter/

STYBR: They just expected you to know, huh?

LITTLE: (nodded) "Just go down," he says, "and you'll see a store down there, and just turn to the left down there and it'll take you over to Bankhead Highway." And it did, too. And when we was down near Townley, Joan, your mama, she was playin' out in the log pile out there -- wood cut up for the fireplace, you know -- and boy! did she get covered with ants -- big, black ants. All over her. Her ma had to take her in and take her clothes all off, you know, and wash her and get all the ants off of her, and boy

STYBR: I'll bet that wasn't very funny, getting ants on her.

LITTLE: Oh, geez, no!

STYBR: Well, Grandpa, do you remember World War I? Do you remember how bad that was?

LITTLE: No, I don't remember very much.

STYBR: You were still kind of young, weren't you?

LITTLE: I was eighteen. I was about ready to go. I was examined and everything to go.

STYBR: Oh. Why didn't you go?

LITTLE: It was called off. I was examined in July or August, now, and the Armistice was signed in November.

STYBR: Oh.... Boy! That was pretty lucky.

LITTLE: So I wasn't called. They told me over there when they examined me -- they said, "You won't have to go," he says. "Why?" "It'll be over before you have to go." Well, it was, too.

STYBR: Isn't that something! I'll bet you were glad, huh?

LITTLE: Yeah, I was glad; and still, I'd have liked to have went, too, you know.

STYBR: Yeah. Just to know what it'd be like.

LITTLE: Maybe I wouldn't be here today, but just to see what it would be like

STYBR: But were there very hard times over here when the war was going on? You probably didn't realize that much ...

LITTLE: You couldn't get sugar; you couldn't hardly get gas and all that. And they was savin' it all for the military, you know. But we got by; everybody else got by, too.

STYBR: Did any of your friends go over there -- to the war?

LITTLE: Yeah, oh, yeah. Older ones it'd be, you know. And there was younger ones, too, that enlisted. But I wasn't about to go and enlist.

/Chuckle/

STYBR: What did the older ones have to say? Did they ever tell you stories?

LITTLE: Some of them never come back. No, they wouldn't talk much about it. It was too bad over there; they just wanted to forget it, that's all.

STYBR: I'll bet. So glad to be back, they didn't want to remember it.

LITTLE: They wanted to forget. Oh, once in a while, they'd be a guy, you know, a blabber-mouth -- he'd like to tell a lot, even if he didn't do it, you know.

STYBR: Acting like a hero?

LITTLE: Yeah, yeah.

STYBR: Do you think that is all you have to say, or can you remember anything else?

LITTLE: I don't know what else to say now.

STYBR: You really said a lot. You know you covered a lot of stuff. Thank you very much, Grandpa, you've helped us a lot.

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